

Testimony
Submitted to the
Education Committee

March 9, 2009

SENATE BILL NO. 830 AN ACT CONCERNING THE
GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING EDUCATION

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleishmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Denise Gallucci and it is my privilege to serve as the General Director of Magnet Schools for the Capitol Region Education Council. Accompanying me today is Executive Director of CREC Bruce Douglas, Principal of the Metropolitan Learning Center Anne McKernan and Principal of the Greater Hartford Academy of Math and Science and Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts Eric Bernstein. Students from both schools are also here today to show their support for magnet schools.

It is an honor to testify before the Education Committee concerning proposed Senate Bill 830 - An Act Concerning the Governor's Recommendations Regarding Education. I am here today to address the benefits and value of interdistrict magnet schools, as well express my concerns regarding the future of magnet schools and their expansion in the state as a result of the omission of Commissioner Mark McQuillan's proposed funding for the Sheff II Stipulated Order in the administration's budget submitted to the General Assembly on February 4.

Justice delayed is justice denied. This statement has been the driving force behind the case, *Sheff v. O'Neill* for greater than ten years. In 1996, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled that students in Hartford were racially, ethnically and economically isolated. As a result, it was determined that Hartford students hadn't received their right to an equal educational opportunity under the state constitution. Therefore, the state of Connecticut was ordered to remedy this educational disparity. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) initiated interdistrict magnet school programs and expanded the Open Choice Program to increase integration.

CREC operates eleven award winning interdistrict magnet schools that have earned national recognition for their commitment to excellence, academic rigor, diverse learning communities, and high standards of excellence. Recently two of our magnet schools were designated "Schools of Excellence" which is the highest honor awarded by Magnet Schools of America. In addition, the United States Department of Education recognized the Metropolitan Learning Center as one of "The Most Successful Magnet High Schools in America." With over 99% of high school students graduating on time to pursue college, I believe the benefits of a magnet education speak for itself. I am concerned that without

proper funding, CREC and others will not be able to provide choice options to students where success is guaranteed.

Suburban school districts have been historically supportive of voluntary integration through interdistrict magnet schools. Superintendents and boards of education members regularly attend meetings to plan collaboratively and solve problems to ensure all students, not only those attending from their towns, feel supported and meet with success. We are grateful for the time and effort superintendents and board members dedicate to CREC magnet schools. It is most unfortunate that tuition costs for sending students to magnet schools have now become a burden to local school districts. Boards of Education are reducing and eliminating programs in their school districts in order to support tuitions to interdistrict magnet schools. The Sheff remedy is working, the achievement gap is closing, and integrated, high quality education is happening; however, the funding formula is not supporting and promoting its success.

I respectfully request that you work with the General Assembly to enact legislation whereby the State of Connecticut assumes the full cost of funding magnet schools state-wide. Given the compounding impact of the Stipulated Order to meet the 2013 goals and the Parent Choice legislation which permits all of Connecticut's students to apply to magnet schools, school districts cannot sustain sharply increasing tuition costs for significantly more students in the coming years.

Thank you.